"GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE WORKS OF SELECT EVANGELISED WOMEN AUTHORS OF COLONIAL MAHARASHTRA"

A RESEARCH PROPOSAL FOR THE Ph.D. DEGREE

Submitted to

SAVITRIBAI PHULE PUNE UNIVERSITY, PUNE.

by

Subodh Kishor Kshetre

Under the Guidance of

Dr. Madhuri M Dixit

Professor

Department of English

Pemraj Sarda College, Ahmednagar

in

Research Center for English

Department of English

Ahmednagar College,

Ahmednagar.

April 2022

GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE WORKS OF SELECT EVANGELISED WOMEN AUTHORS OF COLONIAL MAHARASHTRA

Introduction:

Colonial period is one of the most paradoxical periods of Indian history in the sense that while it witnessed extreme exploitation and misery of the masses, it also modernised various social fields, particularly through modern education, 'new' knowledge, and modern means of communication. It is this paradoxical nature of the said period that attracts scholars who want to explore new things and revisit its landmark events in the light of contemporary contexts. Shashi Tharoor (2016) very aptly states, "History belongs in the past, but understanding it is the duty of the present". Colonial literature in Indian languages as well as in English is one such social field that invites scholarly exploration of various colonial phenomena and enriches our understanding of the past as well as contemporary issues in India.

During the colonial period, Christian Missionary societies had a strong presence in India whose evangelization mission was carried out mostly through means of education, social service, and literature in particular. Christian missionaries' criticism of the Indian religions, customs, and culture in this era, coupled with introduction of 'new' knowledge through British university education, resulted in the development of social and religious reforms and the emergence of Indian English Literature. M.K. Naik's (1982) definition of Indian English Literature as 'an interesting by-product of an eventful encounter in the late eighteenth century between a vigorous and enterprising Britain and a stagnant and Chaotic India' supports these observations. We find that social movements, reformation and Indian English literature of the colonial period were interdependent and complementary in nature.

Colonial Indian women suffered from various problems namely unequal educational opportunities, custom of Sati, female infanticide practice, opposition to widow remarriage, practice of child marriage, purdah system, etc., that originated mainly from the patriarchal and conventional societies. Bengal, Madras, and especially the Bombay presidency led the reformation and social movements in the colonial period. It pioneered women's education, took initiative in removing oppressive practices like widow remarriage, encouraged new ideas like the age of consent for marriage, etc. and thus led colonial India with momentous work for women empowerment. Revolutionary reformers like Mahatma Jotirao Phule and his wife - the first woman school teacher - Savitribai Phule, started the first Indian school for girls in Pune in 1848. Mahatma Phule wrote many articles and Akhanda (verses) on the plight of common Maharashtrian women, with a sharp eye for delineation of differences of caste regarding the everyday life of women. [(1)] Christian missionaries supported him and provided space for his literary works in their periodicals. Phule was not the only one. Other male reformers also worked for women's emancipation in this period. Mahadev Govind Ranade campaigned against 'Purdah system' and founded 'Widow Marriage Association' (1861). Gopal Hari Deshmukh raised voice against child marriages, dowry, and polygamy in his periodical *Prabhakar*. Dhondo Keshav Karve founded 'Hindu Widow Home' (1896) and 'Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University' (1916). Though the initial work and movements for women empowerment were led by male reformers, women were not silent on the issues concerning their oppression and inequality of gender. There was incipient gender awareness that soon grew more assertive. In 1855, Muktabai Salve, a student of Savitribai Phule, wrote an essay on the plight of Mahars and Mangs of the Pune region in the missionary periodical *Dnyanodaya*. The famous case of 'the death sentence to a young Brahmin widow Vijayalakshmi, for the murder of her illegitimate son' had agitated the mind of educated women like Tarabai Shinde who wrote, *A comparison between Men and Women* (1880) in response to the article published in *Pune Vaibhav* regarding this

case. [(2)] This is an important work because it is still relatable for the sharpness of visionary criticism of the patriarchal society. Likewise, the landmark case against the child marriage (1891) of Rukhmabai Raut had raised significant public debate in colonial India. Pandita Ramabai wrote her debut book *Stree Dharma Neeti* (1882) and criticised Indian society for the exploitation of women.

The work of Christian missionary societies like Zenana Mission (Estd. 1854), and American Mission (Estd. 1813) is significant for spreading awareness and feminist consciousness among women through education and service. Christianity and the philanthropic works of missionaries attracted many intellectuals and high caste people of colonial India toward Christianity, like Haripant Khisti, N V Tilak who were Chitpavan Brahmins, Parsis like Sorabji Karsedji and Muslims like Imam Baksh Bawa, etc. It is observed that mostly the women of evengalised men's families had accepted Christianity due to social conventions. But exceptional women like Pandita Ramabai, and Laxmibai Tilak had willingly chosen Christianity for spiritual reasons after deep study of religion and casteism. These evangelised women of first and the second generation availed modern education in missionary institutions. Many of them visited the western world and completed their higher studies abroad which transformed them into notable examples of Indian women with broadened knowledge, social and gender awareness, and critical views about their society.

This period was led by Pandita Ramabai, who may be respectfully called as the pioneering feminist of India since her work *The High Caste Hindu Women* is called as ‘an unofficial Indian feminist manifesto’ by Meera Kosambi (2016). Many other native women like- Savitribai Phule, Kashibai Kanitkar, Ramabai Ranade, Cornelia Sorabji, etc. had come forward with literary works with gender consciousness in this period which can be said to mark the beginning of Indian feminism. Some of the prominent women authors among them were evangelised native women. Though application of the term feminism here may sound a usage in anachronism, it is used in want of a better term to describe the new awareness about the gendered self that these women showed.

While it seeks similarities with Western Feminism, it also suggests differences because of different cultural, economic, political, and religious backgrounds. A study of emergence of gender consciousness and of feminism in Colonial Maharashtra may be incomplete without a reference to the literary works of the evangelised women authors, as a historical necessity. It is found that the literary contribution of these women still awaits proper scholarly recognition and adequate appreciation for the expression of independent women's voices contained in them. Conversion and remoteness of this period can be identified as two phenomena that may have pushed them into historical forgetfulness. So revisiting their works for gender consciousness and for their literary and social relevance may be rewarding. Accordingly, here is a list of the works by some prominent and pioneering evangelised women authors form the colonial period, selected for analysis in the present doctoral research:

1) Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922):

1.1) Stree Dharma Neeti (Morals for Women), 1882

1.2) Englandcha Pravas (Voyage to England), 1883

1.3) The High-Caste Hindu Women, 1887

1.4) United Stateschi Loksthiti ani Pravasvrutta (The People of United States), 1189

1.5) A Testimony of our inexhaustible treasure, 1907

2) Krupabai Sattianadhan (1862-1894):

2.1) Saguna: A story of Native Christian Life, 1888

2.2) Kamala: A story of Hindu Life, 1894

3) Shevantibai Nikambe (1865-1930):

3.1) Ratanbai: A sketch of Bombay High-Caste Hindu Wife, 1895

4) Cornelia Sorabji (1866-1954):

4.1) Love and Life Behind the Purdah, 1901

4.2) Between the Twilights: Being Studies of Indian Women by On of Themselves, 1908

4.3) Indian Tales of the Great Ones, 1916

4.4) India Calling, 1934

4.5) India Recalled, 1936

5) Lakshmibai Tilak (1868-1936):

5.1) Smritichitre: The Memoirs of a Spirited Wife, 1934

5.2) Bharali Ghagar (published posthumously and edited by: D.N.Tilak), 1951

Rationale and Significance of the topic:

The select evangelised women authors and their literary works are important sources for the study of emergence of gender consciousness and feminism in India as they discuss the peripheralised existence of women which opens spaces for scholarly interpretation. Study of these works highlight and differentiate the characteristics of Indian feminism. They comment on and analyse the issues of women's illiteracy, child marriage, women's marginal position in patriarchy, widows' plight, and gender inequalities which existed in their contemporary society. Considering that these issues are still prominent social issues in India. These authors had also proposed different ways of women's emancipation through their works and explicated the role of gender in Colonial Indian society, culture, religious system, and literature, etc. by considering 'woman' at the center of their works which link as well as provide background to the contemporary gender issues with the past. So the proposed research intends to find new socio-cultural and literary insights into their writings.

These works are also found to discuss the position of Indian women in Indian history, myths, and religious books and compare that with similar observations from the western world. Therefore, the present study sees the potential to explore emerging Indian gender consciousness which can be seen as the emergence of Indian Feminism.

Review of Literature:

As it looks on the Shodhganga thesis repository, it is clear that very few prominent doctoral research works have been done on the works of select authors. It seems that the aspects of gender consciousness, conversions of these authors to Christianity, and their position in Colonial Maharashtra need to analyse adequately.

Select authors and their literary works do not find adequate mention, analysis and appreciation in the works on the history of Indian literature, colonial or otherwise, by authors like- M. K. Naik, Priyamvada Gopal, Suman Raje, etc. It seems that the prominence is given to the works of male authors rather than women authors in the history of Indian literature.

When we look at scholarly fields, it is found that there are some critical books by Meera Kosambi, Padma Anagol, and Uma Chakraborty available on the work of Pandita Ramabai and feminist consciousness in Colonial India which throw light on the social and historical aspects of her work and the colonial time. Scholars like Eunice De Souza and Chandani Lokuge edited some works of Krupabai Sattianathan and Shevantibai Nikambe.

When we explore different types of archives, ex. Periodicals, we find old issues of Marathi periodicals like- *Dnyanodaya* and *Kesari* are available in archives which are prominent sources for understanding the socio-cultural and political context of the select works. So the researcher is going to analyse the works of select evangelised authors from the Feminist perspective and also going to study the social value and background of the literary works which is novel research in the literary field.

Statement of Aim:

This research aims to study and analyse the expression of gender consciousness in the literary works of select evangelised women authors and situate it in the context of the emergence and evolution of Feminism in India with special reference to Colonial Maharashtra.

Objectives:

1) To explore the socio-cultural and literary scenario of Colonial Maharashtra to understand the discourse of gender consciousness.
2) To understand the discourse of evangelism in colonial Maharashtra with reference to the select women authors' literary works.
3) To analyse and situate the select evangelised authors' works with regards to their perception of feminism and with reference to literary output of colonial women authors in Marathi.

Methodology and Techniques:

Since the requirement of this research invites descriptive, exploratory, and interpretative methods the proposed research will follow a qualitative research methodology and discourse analysis. Apart from a close and critical reading of the select works, a wide frame of reference with regard to the socio-cultural and literary aspects of Colonial Maharashtra will be prepared with the intention of situating the select works in it. The available discourse of feminist criticism will be applied to the select works. A working archive will be prepared for understanding and establishing connections, if any, between the evangelism, women's writings and feminist awareness.

Possible Conclusions:

1. It is expected that a detailed understanding of the native discourse of gender consciousness or

even early Feminism will be generated through the study.

2. The relevance of past issues will be studied further with reference to the contemporary times.

3. The proposed study may be able to highlight the contribution of select evangelised authors and that their independent voices will be appreciated. Thus the study may 'do' feminism.

Plan of Research:

After the approval of this research proposal by experts, I will complete the course work and library referencing in the first year of this doctoral research. Then, in the second year, I will analyse and situate works of the select authors into reference frame and the next phase will be Synopsis writing and Thesis writing in the third year of this course.

Tentative Chapterisation:

Title: ***Gender Consciousness in the Works of Select Evangelised Women Authors of Colonial Maharashtra***

Chapter I. Colonial Maharashtra: Socio-cultural, Political, Literary Background and women's issues.

Chapter II. Introducing Evangelised Women Authors: Background, Conversion and Works

Chapter III. Early Feminism?: Gender Consciousness in Colonial Maharashtra

Chapter IV. Genre, Language, Selfhood and New Knowledge

Chapter V. Conclusion

- **Notes:**

(1) Mahatma Jotiba Phule had written fine poetry in folk forms of Akhandas (Verses). *A Peasant Woman (kulambin)* is one such poem which shows his gender sensitivity. Here he portrays the plight of common woman and compares her with the privileged high caste woman.

Example- Stanza 4 of the Akhanda *Kulambin*: She has to carry the pails (pots) of water at her waist, and has to mix the dry leaves (rubbish) in the cow-dung. She tucks up her sari carefully and mixes the cow-dung evenly with her bare feet. She, then, turns this into cow-dung cakes (pats) in the burning sun. The poor hard-working peasant-woman cannot afford the luxury of sitting on a swing in the cool shade like the Bhat woman. (The Brahmins) call such a hard-working woman as a 'peasant-woman' and lord it over others (as masters), says Joti. (Translated by Patil, P G. Selections from the Collected Works of Mahatma Phule Vol.II, The Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1991.)

(2) Shinde, Tarabai. *Stree Purush Tulana*. Pune, 1882.

- **Bibliography:**

Primary Sources:

- Ramabai, Pandita. *A Testimony of our inexhaustible treasure.* Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission, 1999.
- Ramabai, Pandita. *Stree Dharma Neeti*. White light Publication, 2014.
- Ramabai, Pandita. *The High Caste Hindu Woman.* Maharashtra State Board for Literature & Culture, 1981.
- Ramabai, Pandita. *Pandita Ramabai Yancha Englandcha Pravas.* Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya ani Sanskruti Mandal, 1988.
- Ramabai, Pandita. *United Stateschi Loksthiti ani Pravasvrutta.* Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya ani Sanskruti Mandal, 1996.
- Sattianadhan, Krupabai. *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life.* Edited by Chandani Lokuge', Oxford University Press, 1998.

- Sattianadhan, Krupabai. *Kamala: The story of a Hindu life.* Edited by Chandani Lokuge', Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Nikambe, Shevantibai. *Ratanbai: A sketch of a Bombay High-Caste Hindu young Wife.* Sahitya Akademi, 2003.
- Sorabji, Cornelia. *India Calling: The Memories of Cornelia Sorabji.* Nisbet & Co., 1934.
- Sorabji, Cornelia. *India Recalled: The Memories of Cornelia Sorabji.* Nisbet & Co., 1934.
- Sorabji, Cornelia. *Love and Life behind Purdah*. Graphic arts book, 2021.
- Sorabji, Cornelia. *Between the Twilights: Being Studies of Indian Women by On of Themselves.* Harper and Brothers, 1908.
- Sorabji, Cornelia. *Indian Tales of the Great Ones.* Blackie and Sons Limited, 1916.
- Tilak, Lakshmibai. *Smritichitre: The memoirs of a spirited wife.* Speaking Tiger Publishing Private Limited, 2017.
- Tilak, Lakshmibai. *Bharali Ghagar.* Edited by Devdatta Tilak, Keshav Bhikaji Dhavale, 1951.

Secondary Sources:

English:

- Chakravarti, Uma. *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai.* Zuban, 2013.
- Kosambi, Meera. *Pandita Ramabai's Feminist and Christian Conversions: Focus on Stree Dharma Neeti.* Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University, 1995.
- Sorabji, Richard. *Opening Doors: The Untold Story of Cornelia Sorabji.* Penguin India, 2010.
- Berry, Peter. *Beginning Theory.* Viva Books, 2010.
- Gopal, Priyamvada. *The Indian English Novel.* Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Naik, M.K. *A History of English Literature.* Sahitya Akademy, 2009.
- Anagol, Padma. *The Emergence of Feminism in India, 1850-1920*. Routledge, 2016.
- Tharoor, Shashi. *An Era of Darkness.* Alpha Book Company, 2016.

Marathi Secondary Sources:

- Tilak, Ashok. *Chalta Bolta Chamatkar.* Popular Prakashan, Mumbai. 2011
- Tilak, Devdatta. *Maharashtrachi Tejasvini Pandita Ramabai.* White light Publications, 2012.

Hindi Secondary Sources:

- Anamika. *Das Dware ka Pinjara.* Rajkamal Paperbacks, 2021.
- Raje, Suman. *Hindi Sahitya ka Aadha Itihaas.* Bhartiya Dnyanpeeth, 2019.

Newspapers/Periodicals:

- Dnyanodaya
- Kesari

Stage Adaptations:

•Smruti Chitre (TV Drama), D D Sahyadri.

•Jyotirpunj Pandita Ramabai (Radio Drama), Akashwani AIR.

Subodh Kishor Kshetre — **Research Student**

Dr. Prof. Madhuri M Dixit — **Research Supervisor**